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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of the assessment of faculty job performance at American colleges and universities, examining historical and current trends in faculty evaluation. It reviews the concept of faculty evaluation in the colonial period through the 20th century, focusing on recent efforts to hold faculty more accountable for their job performance. It argues that the current state of assessment and underlying theories for this increased attention to measurement and evaluation of faculty may reflect external and internal jockeying for power. It maintains that student evaluation of faculty has led to a lowered quality of education, and that peer review is ineffective. It concludes that current assessment procedures do not assist in the improvement of instruction and should be replaced by a review of faculty performance through professional organizations. (Contains 17 references.) (MDM)

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The Politics of Assessment of the Professoriate

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The Politics of Assessment of the Professoriate in Education

Reflections On Challenges Facing Higher Education

James Van Patten, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

There is increased pressure to have data-based decision making in higher education. As a route to this end, massive amounts of information are collected, tabulated, and disseminated in our colleges and universities. Current assessment measures are due in no small measure to the push for reform in higher education from legislatures, parents, students, community and business groups, as well as professional organizations such as the Association for the Study of Higher Education and the Carnegie Commission.

The current state of assessment and the underlying theories for this increased attention to measurement and evaluation of faculty may reflect external and internal jockeying for power. Veblen in *Higher Learning in America* noted the tendency for educators to ape business models. Bureaucratic organizations and systems of scholastic accountancy, he found, are the end result. The continued efforts to reform systems is to be noted by Petronius Arbiter, who noted in 210 B.C.:

> We trained hard, we performed well...but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams and become reasonably proficient we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing...and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization.

Reflections on Reform and Assessment

David Clark, Kenan Professor of Education at the University of North Carolina in the *Kappan*, March 1994 (1) notes that the language of reform reports is still dominated by the harshness of bureaucracy, control, competition and intervention with an end result of confusion, alienation, and withdrawal. Variations of this bureaucracy is found in writings such as Cahn in *Ethics in Academia: Saints and Scholars*,(2) who notes there is an almost universal practice of rating instructors on a scale of 1-5 which results in sending inane data to faculty members with the understanding their scores will play a significant role in consideration for reappointment, promotion, tenure or salary appraisal. Cahn as well as Solomon in *Up the University: Recreating Higher Education in America* (3) note that attempts to make the university more efficient through accountability measures of the professoriate lead to miles of red tape, hours of meetings, confused students, and an infuriated professoriate. The Solomon's also note that peer review, so popular in our universities, given the bitter competitive and political atmosphere of the university and the dramatic differences in styles and approaches, not to mention the ideological differences concerning the same subject matter, is notoriously undependable as a form of evaluation.

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To ape business in the academic community, as Thorstein Veblen noted in his *Higher Learning in America*,(4) the language of business has been incorporated into the jargon of colleges and universities. Terms such as accountability, performance assessment, outcomes, and portfolios reflect a language of control and bureaucracy.

Historical Perspective

Rudolph (5) notes that in colonial times, professors were recruited from men who believed that in serving the cause of knowledge and truth by promoting liberal education, they were serving the cause of religion. He finds that some clergy who had health problems such as deafness or voices too weak to command a parish, turned to a college professorship as a rest cure. Rudolph wrote that the concept of professors work divorced from the real world was dealt with in 1888. In that year, President Francis L. Patton of Princeton declared that college administration is a business in which trustees are partners, professors the salesmen and students the customers. Governing boards viewed themselves as preservers of collegiate virtue, allowing professors to play around with matters of curriculum but not allowing them to forget that definition and public image of the institution were special matters for trustee decision. Butts and Cremin (6) discussed the demand for Lernfreiheit, which found fertile ground with Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard from 1869 to 1909. Eliot promoted a threefold view of reform for higher education: first, an ideal of a university; second, an ideal of liberal education; and third the ideal of freedom of learning. Eliot was confronted with resistance to his elective system from the traditional liberal arts advocates such as Andrew F. West at Yale. But Eliot was in tune with those who saw the value of practical and utilitarian studies. Although Eliot did not view his elective system as a reflection of a move toward efficiency, such proved the case in years to follow. Butts and Cremin (7) referred to a Phi Beta Kappa address of Charles Francis Adams in 1883 entitled *A College Fetish*. Adams' talk was an attack on the ideal of liberal education. He noted that a limited classical curriculum in the face of newer and more particle demands was fetish worship, pure and simple. Adams' continued by noting that "..... I am practical and of this world enough to believe, that in a utilitarian and scientific age the living will not forever be sacrificed to the dead."

The land grant college Morrill Act of 1862 further expanded the movement toward the practical in higher education. In the early 1900s, Frederick Taylor's *Scientific Management Theories* led to concepts of efficiency in public schools. Callahan's *Cult of Efficiency* demonstrated the inappropriateness of using business models for public schools.

Movement Toward Accountability

Although most college faculty members were evaluated by their department chairpersons and deans through the 1960s, change was in the air. With student protests of the 1960's, the public pushed legislators to impose ever more controls on college and university administration and faculty. Within the last five years, legislators have increasingly pushed legislation governing college and university evaluation of faculty performance. In general business models of efficiency have been followed. Terms such as reengineering,

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productivity, consumer focus, and total quality management have been utilized increasingly in university management.

As a response, university and college administrators invoked a managerial culture in which educational outcomes were clearly specified and the criteria for judging performance could be identified and employed. (8) Faculty members and others who move into managerial positions devote time and attention to specification of educational objectives or outcomes, and to the sequencing of autonomous instruction units, and to the selection and use of instructional methods that draw on resources other than the faculty member. (9) Those individuals taking on managerial roles within the various colleges take on the role of a bureaucrat. Enhancing their turf and power by a multitude of rules, regulations and decrees, regardless of rationale, they add to the administrative hierarchy with ever larger support staff. A state study, " The Higher Education Institutional Data Inventory of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor identified an administrator to faculty ratio of .084 administrator for every faculty member or 3,180 faculty members and teaching assistants and 2,662 administrative and professional employees. (10)

As the administrative staff increased in recent years, university funds found their way into other channels than faculty salaries or instructional support facilities. Under the business model, faculty members became employees whose performance is measured by sophisticated but meaningless criteria. As the administrative staff increased, decision making became a threat to their prestige and power. To deflect such a threat, administrators turned to a committee model, having faculty committees give various consultation and advice. Should things go wrong, administrators could easily point to the committee machinery as the source of the decisions.

Meanwhile, decrees, mandates, rules and regulations proliferate as administrators pass down whatever new piece of legislation or idea comes through central administration. Faculty members face anxiety, tension and concern as they try very hard to deal with an increasingly heavy teaching, advising, and publication role. Their tensions increase as they try to determine what is really important at evaluation time in the face of mixed signals.

Decrees, rules and regulations are frequently avoided by administrators as they reflect a divergence between theory and practice, between their own rules and their behavior or action. Thus, rewards go first to those in the administrative hierarchy, secondly to those who know how the game is played, and finally whatever is left to those diligent, giving, caring, productive individuals whose work is seldom rewarded.

Reflections on the Budget Game

The unrewarded faculty, continue their excessive workload while new faculty often have additional funds for professional development, light workloads, and determine changes in curriculum content, advisement policy and departmental mission. Senior faculty face salary compression, lack of recognition and reward for their work, and many opt out of the system, so little valued is their expertise and knowledge. Use of the current business model with its focus on bottom line performance, dismissing or laying off thousands of workers,

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concentrating on efficiency over people needs, has resulted in college and university managers exploring avenues to encourage senior faculty members to leave. Although at most institutions, salary differential between senior and junior faculty is minimal at best, the literature in higher education focuses on the few institutions with high differentials. Andrew Hacker in "Too Many Full Professors: A Top-Heavy Pyramid" (11) reflects increasingly strident criticism of full tenured professors. He notes that the biggest item in college budgets has remained sacrosanct. Jobs and salaries of tenured faculty have gone virtually untouched. Pay for full professors can rise above $100,000 and can reach $60,000 in "second-tier" institutions. He continues by noting that students are increasingly taught by professors even older than their parents and the age gap may hamper older professors insofar as effective teaching requires an awareness of young people's sensibilities. With the elimination of mandatory retirement age, there is increasing concern with high health cost and potential lawsuits under the 1991 Civil Rights Act section or the American Disabilities Act from faculty who can no longer perform their duties. Since every research study done to date on the subject finds that faculty members retire early, and very few stay on, the preoccupation with senior faculty appears unwarranted at best, and a ploy to employment efficiency management processes to eliminate experienced faculty.

Reflections on Points of View

Administrators often criticize faculty members for not being in their offices for advisement, suggesting most of the advisement is carried out by departmental secretaries. Faculty response is that they are pushed to present papers before professional associations, publish in refereed journals and most of all strive to acquire state, federal or private foundation grants. For those who have the specialized skills to acquire grants, special status is achieved. The grantspersons have support services, little if any teaching loads, and are beneficiaries of a reward system tilted to such activity. William Arrowsmith in "The Future of Teaching," noted that there must be something more than management by administrators; there must be leadership, which means a sense of the whole endeavor." (12) This is especially important as we approach the 21st century, since assessment models pose a threat to the ideal of the university-to the pursuit of truth-to unhindered inquiry. In Florida as in Arkansas, there are currently ever more strident calls in the legislatures for elimination, or modification of tenure. The threat to academic freedom is real as the industrial model of efficiency begins to take center stage. I often show my classes a film entitled "perceptions" which depicts an efficiency engineer studying ways to cut costs of a symphony orchestra through what he called minimax. Cutting a Mozart piece by one-third, overhead costs of lighting, heating or air conditioning could be reduced; through eliminating the violin section as well as those instruments who players simply repeat notes, one could minimize the costs and maximize efficiency of those players still on stage. Applying inappropriate management theories to the educational endeavor may well lead to dysfunctional organizations. One can argue as Dewey did in 1930, that "the loyalties which once held individuals, which gave them support, direction and unity of outlook on life, have well-nigh disappeared. In consequence, individuals are confused and bewildered." (13) This appears to be the case with our higher education faculty as they seek to survive in a crisis culture.

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A response in some states is collective bargaining contracts which allow some protection from excessive impingement on faculty class preparation time, but often limit innovation and support status quo and protect the unproductive.

Meanwhile Departments of Higher Education in the various states, respond to current trends in social concerns. Currently many State Deparrments of Higher Education institute modified funding proposals, or what is perceived as bold new directions in assessment. Utilizing past funding formulas of Full Time Equivalent headcount together with allocation of resources on the basis of retention, graduation rates, and minority student and faculty retention and recruitment, they stress a social agenda through "equity funding." These equity funding formulas create new challenges for assessment of higher education faculty. Demands for higher education reform include raising standards for admission, increasing curriculum requirements for degree programs, and stress on higher standards of student performance. At the same time, demands for equity require attention to those students with special remedial needs, various handicaps, and making extraordinary efforts to assure challenged students have all the support necessary to enable them to compete effectively.

Using standardized student rating systems to allocate resources among the faculty, often fails to fulfill the original aim for faculty evaluation. The sole aim of student evaluation of faculty originally was to improve instruction. But, as in the industrial model, reductionism reigns supreme. Breaking totalities into parts allows for more effective itemizing of behavior for measurement purposes. However, teaching-learning in colleges and universities differs from industrial models. Ideals, creativity, innovation, responding to unpredictable human behavior patterns, open door policies allowing students to have access to faculty for special advisement, serving on a multitude of university committees, meeting with doctoral committees, all are elements that cannot be effectively dealt with in the industrial or machine model.

Reflections on Legal Factors and Assessment

In our current litigious environment, lawsuits are proliferating in our higher education institutions as in our society. Although most lawsuits dealing with evaluation and assessment concern nontenured faculty issued terminal contracts, there have been a few cases that dealt with unequal allocation and distribution of resources between senior and junior faculty. Courts are challenged to consider whether faculty evaluation is fact or opinion. Traditionally courts have held opinions are protected, but only statements of facts can serve as a basis for liability in defamation suits. A 1990 case *Rosenthal v. Regents of the University of California* 269 Cal. Rptr. 788 (Ct.App.1990) involved a professor serving as a department chair who was the subject of a report by a university committee evaluating the effectiveness of the department. He claimed certain statements in the evaluation report defamed him, but the trial court found for the university. On appeal to the California Court of Appeals the professor's claim was found nonactionable because statements in the report were opinions of the reviewing committee. The U.S. Supreme Court in *Milkovich v. Loraine Journal Co.*, rejected a wholsesale defamation exemption

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for anything that might be labeled opinion. The S.C. ruling noted that a statement of opinion which does not contain a provably false factual connotation will receive full consitutional protection. (14) The upshot for colleges and universities is that reliance on evaluation or assessment for personnel decisions will require care that any statements made have some factual basis and absence of malice. The *Wirsing v. Board of Regents of the University of Colorado*, 739 F. Supp. 551 (D. Colorado 1990) case that was discussed in one of our earlier meetings is interesting. The finding of the Federal Court of Appeals was that if an evaluation or assessment system is university policy incorporated into a faculty contract and personnel policy for all employees it is a valid requirement. Whether or not it is a threat to academic freedom and tenure is for future court cases to decide.

As our researchers point out evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives. Assessment is used broadly like evaluation to indicate the use of both formal and informal data gathering procedures and the combining of the data in a global fashion to reach an overall judgment. We never measure or evaluate the worth of a person but characteristics or properties of people such as their scholastic potential. (15) The challenge of university department heads is to use such measures with integrity and not get entangled in a subtle web of political game playing which lead to faculty morale problems.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Allegre, Guista; Young; Carey; Platt; Engdahl; O' Connell and Dickinson; Goldman; and Hensley (1993) all explored various aspects of assessment.(16) These researchers found:

1) Assessment procedures do not serve a goal of improvement of instruction.

2) Current forms of student evaluation and peer review of faculty should be replaced by review of faculty performance through professional organizations.

3) Student evaluation of faculty has led to a lowered quality of education.

4) Current faculty evaluation methods are limited in effectiveness.

5) Student evaluation of faculty is used as an instrument of intimidation to force conformity to politically correct standards.

6) Current assessment models of faculty do not eliminate poor or below-average teachers.

7) Student evaluation is one of several factors contributing to the decline of U.S. universities standards.

8) Assessment through standardized forms of evaluation belittle students by blending them into an anonymous mass and emphasize that writing is unimportant.

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9) Assessment measures currently in use, rather than increasing students' influence, enhance administrators' power and pose a danger to intellectual freedom.

10)The timing of grading on student evaluations effects the outcome and leads to grade inflation.

The Future

One of the philosophers whom I have worked with through the years, always ended his presentations by noting that things cannot be as upbeat as we might wish them to be, nor as negative as our worst pessimists might foresee. Challenges faced by our institutions of higher education will be balanced through an Aristotelian *Golden Mean* which seeks an equilibrium among competing strengths and weaknesses within organizations.

Faculty resources are very precious and, although currently higher education institutions face a multitude of challenges from single interest groups, all is not lost. Faculty members can work to demonstrate their needs for freedom from the business model of bureaucracy and efficiency and stress the ideal of the university. Under the concept of the ideal of the university, the professoriate would be free from excessive bureaucratic challenges. Resources of the university could more adequately be funneled into facilities for enhancing the teaching-learning process. That there is discontent with the university-its management and mission- is clear as parents who pay an increasing share of the costs through higher tuition rates, are beginning to seek reform within the system. Together with state legislatures, parents will seek reform of higher education as they have within the public schools. We need to be aware, however, that any meaningful end result of public school reform has been minimal at best, and has led to a language of distrust and inspection at worst.(17)

One response to the challenges facing university faculty, would be to articulate more fully the aim or mission of higher education in a democratic society. Shared dialogue, search for a more effective social system, quest for a common value system, and building interchange between and among disciplines might be a start to dealing with the pressing issues facing higher education institutions administrators facing ever new legislative demands for a variety of conflicting assessment measures, faculty concerns with dysfunctional evaluation systems, and parents wanting to know why tuition rates are increasing.

It might also be helpful for the various populaces within colleges and universities to have access to information as to the way resources are distributed. Philosophers of education have an important role to play in identifying challenges to intellectual and academic freedom. This is a matter of integrity to our profession as well as to a professional ethic. There is a crisis of confidence in our culture and our institutions. Theodore Brameld addressed this issue in the 1970s. The problem has become more acute since that time. Threats to our institutional and individual integrity ought be balanced with a recognition that our professoriate must be a treasured and valued national resource. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the plurality opinion of four supreme court justices with two

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concurring justices expressing similar thoughts in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234 (1957.

> The essentiality of freedom in the community of American universities is almost self evident. No one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth. To impose any straitjacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our nation.... Scholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise, our civilization will stagnate and die (354 U.S. at 250).

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